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Keeping secrets

The decision to order the interception of the Egyptian airliner carrying the four Achille Lauro pirates was made in a rush. The intelligence agencies, the Pentagon and the National Security Council had to work it all out in a few hours and present the case to President Reagan, who was traveling in the Midwest and made the decision on the run.

He gave the okay—and the operation was a triumph. Now Sen. Dave Durenberger, chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, says it was all done in the wrong way.

He says Reagan should have consulted or informed him. Durenberger would have consulted his committee, or phoned around to tell everyone a super-secret airborne interception was in the works. The idea is absolutely preposterous.

Too many people in Washington know too many secrets—and Congress leaks like a sieve. After the CIA scandals of the early '70s, eight committees had access to top secret intelligence. So there were no secrets. There are now two committees on the circuit, but they are too big and unreliable.

The lesson isn't Durenberger's—the more the merrier—but the opposite: The fewer people in the circuit, the better.